

*Publications Committee*

**BULLETIN**  
OF THE  
**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS**

1916 : No. 15

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MARCH 10

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**The English Bulletin**  
(Vol. I, No. 2, March, 1916)



Published by the University six times a month and entered as  
second-class matter at the postoffice at

AUSTIN, TEXAS

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A. C. BALDWIN & SONS: AUSTIN

B275-516-2m

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**The benefits of education and of useful knowledge, generally diffused through a community, are essential to the preservation of a free government.**

**Sam Houston.**

**Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy. . . . It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire.**

**Mirabeau B. Lamar.**



# **The English Bulletin**

(Vol. I, No. 2, March, 1916)

**Editors: KILLIS CAMPBELL  
E. M. CLARK  
L. W. PAYNE, JR.**

**The English Bulletin** is intended as an organ for the expression of opinion by teachers of English in Texas concerning pedagogical and other problems that arise in their work. It will appear from one to three times a year.

Copies of this bulletin will be sent free, on application, to any teacher of English in Texas. Address **The English Bulletin**, the University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

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## ORAL COMPOSITION IN SCHOOL AND COLLEGE<sup>1</sup>

BY THOMAS EWING FERGUSON, M. A., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF  
ENGLISH, SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

### *Definition of the Term*

The term "Oral Composition" has only recently come into our professional vocabulary. Within the last three or four years, however, a great deal has been said about the new way of teaching composition; and at present the country is beginning to be flooded with literature on oral English in its various phases. Individuals from everywhere are writing articles on the subject, outlining methods, and explaining the merits of the course. Associations of teachers of English are recommending that oral composition be emphasized more in school and college. Many of the recent rhetorics devote a section to the subject; and in a few cases whole books dealing exclusively with oral composition have been published.<sup>2</sup> What, then, is meant by oral composition? The whole matter is one of emphasis rather than one of aim, for whether the teacher wishes to follow the traditional methods or to adopt new ways, he aims in the end to have his pupils write and speak good English,—grammatically correct, coherent, simple, forceful, harmonious. As a matter of fact, there is no distinct dividing line between the methods of teaching composition. This is true, regardless of the fact that there are certain fundamental differences: for the most radical of the new propagandists do not advocate doing away with the written composition entirely, nor do the most conservative traditionalists fail to value highly the need of much oral expression. But the normal advocate of the new method would have the pupil, as a part of his

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<sup>1</sup>Since my freshman year in college, I have felt that the composition offered in our best universities is decidedly practical and successful. Consequently, I have been interested to make a fair examination of the arguments for oral composition, which, as a formal method, involves, to say the least, a wide departure from existing methods.

<sup>2</sup>See in particular W. Palmer Smith's *Oral English in Secondary Schools*, The Macmillan Co., New York City; Cornelia C. Ward's *Oral Composition*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1914; and Emma Bolenius's *Teaching of Oral English*, Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1914.

work, stand in the front of the room, face his classmates as an audience, and, with or without notes, deliver orally the thoughts of his mind. The main considerations of instruction involved here and not in the written work are poise, breathing, and voice training. There is a better chance, too, it is claimed, for emphasis on correct pronunciation and distinct enunciation. In another section of this paper I shall discuss various other advantages claimed for oral composition over written composition, but it will be seen there that the teacher of written composition has the same ends in view as the teacher of oral composition. Whether the one or the other can accomplish his ends the more effectively is a matter for pedagogic discussion and one that I leave for the reader to decide on the basis of the facts herein set forth. It is my first object to try to summarize the arguments made by the advocates of the oral method, and then to weigh those arguments in the light of reason and experience. I should say here that those who endorse oral methods realize in their own minds a universal need for their kind of work, and are not willing to leave the matter of oral composition to classes in elocution or to the less formal devices that I shall mention in concluding this paper. Rather than speak of this new kind of work as oral English or oral composition, which are more or less ambiguous terms, some of its advocates speak of it as the utilitarian phase, that is, the union of actual life with composition; others refer to it as the social method in teaching English.

### *Oral Composition as It Is Being Taught*

My information as to how much oral composition is being done in the schools and colleges of the country is not at all exhaustive, but I am convinced that the new movement is not only spreading widely, but is being received with considerable enthusiasm. In fact, the enthusiasm is so great on the part of individuals that one is almost inclined to fear that he is facing an ephemeral fad in English composition. At any rate, enough is being done to cause teachers of English everywhere to listen to the arguments of their fellow teachers.

Much of the current discussion of oral composition has been made from the point of view of the high school. In New Jersey, New York, New Hampshire, and as far west as Illinois, many

high schools have more or less definite work in oral composition. An exceptionally brilliant freshman of Harvard College, a graduate of a New Jersey high school, recently told me that he considered his training in oral composition a great help to him socially. On several occasions at parties in Boston he had been called upon to act as toastmaster or to make a speech of some kind, and he thought he would have been entirely at a loss had he not had training in standing before his classmates in high school. Mr. J. M. Clapp of Lake Forest College, Illinois, says<sup>1</sup> that the graduates of the high schools of Illinois were asked systematically to vote on what kind of instruction they considered was needed most in high school. This vote was taken some time after these students had left school. On the whole, they felt that more instruction was needed in oral composition, punctuation, and spelling; and twice as many votes were cast for oral composition as for the next two, namely, punctuation and spelling. In New York a similar vote was taken, and the importance of oral composition was stressed even more than in Illinois. Mr. Clapp, who is very sanguine on the subject, adds further: "In ten years, I am inclined to think, it [oral composition] will replace much of the written composition now taught in the high-school course." I feel sure that the Eastern states, with the exception of Illinois, are taking the lead in this movement for oral composition in high schools, and that the interest decreases as we go west. In Texas, so far as I can learn, very little is being done towards formal instruction in oral English, except as literary societies are encouraged, and elocution frequently offered. In one high school with which I was connected, debating was frequent not only in English classes but in history classes as well. In that same school an attempt was made to turn the whole school into a literary society once a week, and to make performance of duty a part of the student's credit. Because of the difficulties in making satisfactory programs and in handling excuses, the movement was not very successful, but the experiment goes to show, apparently, that the teachers of that community realized that there was a need for more oral expression from students than the old methods of instruction offered.

I have dwelt at some length upon the work in oral composition

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<sup>1</sup>*English Journal*, Vol. II, p. 18.

in the high school, because I believe that similar work in college is guided largely by the high school impetus. A great many colleges of the country have made experiments in oral composition. At least, individuals in certain colleges have made such experiments. The following experiment was tried in Harvard University some time ago:<sup>1</sup>

1. At a previous recitation, six subjects for oral themes were announced. These themes were to be on the work in hand, three minutes in length, and delivered from notes.

2. A delivered his speech, and the class acted as critics, the students on one row of seats being held responsible for grammatical blunders, those on another row for pronunciation, and so on.

3. A friendly and sympathetic atmosphere was created from the start.

4. Pupils were first given five minutes to put their notes for criticism in form. Later they made their criticisms from a rough draft.

5. B was then given three minutes, and his classmates made criticisms as before. At first four oral themes could be disposed of in an hour. Later, as less time for criticism was allowed, ten students were permitted to speak in an hour.

As much time could be taken for this kind of work as its value would justify. Of course, one of the main ends in view was to make each student a critic of his own speech.

A short time ago, Harvard also did away with the department of public speaking as a separate department and made it a part of the school of English. Furthermore, a course in oral composition was offered in the Harvard Summer School of 1915, and the same course will perhaps be offered again in 1916.<sup>2</sup> Still though these measures have been taken, oral composition is by no means a part of the instruction in English A. Harvard instructors in English have not seriously considered adopting

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<sup>1</sup>C. N. Greenough: *Publications of the New England Association of Teachers of English*, 1912.

<sup>2</sup>It is proper to observe that this course was under the direction of the professor of public speaking, who in fact, if not in name, has little to do with the department of English.

methods in oral composition at the sacrifice of written composition as formerly required.

Other colleges have had experiences similar to those of Harvard. Hamilton College offers a course in oral composition in the Summer School of English. Mr. John M. Clapp, in an article to which I have referred,<sup>1</sup> discusses oral composition from the point of view of the college. He says that the first years in college are a period of vast changes in students,—a period in which their ideals change, their horizons broaden, and their thoughts become more mature. Consequently, their high school instruction is inadequate for more advanced texts and more mature thinking. The subject of oral composition in college is just as vital, then, as it is in high school, for we cannot assume in freshmen a fundamental knowledge of the processes of reading and talking consonant with their new environments. Mr. Clapp says further that the Illinois Conference of High School Teachers is asking all institutions that train high school teachers to give instruction in oral composition, but that the plea is not very strong to the colleges because those in college preparing themselves for teachers are a scattered minority. A similar plea comes from various individuals and organizations.

The National Council of Teachers of English, through its official organ, *The English Journal*, is the greatest force behind organized effort to install methods of oral composition in the teaching of English. I suspect that is one reason why the Illinois Association of Teachers of English is so active in this new movement. A short time ago the Illinois Association appointed a committee to investigate the problem of oral composition and to recommend a course of study which included oral methods. Later I shall have more to say about this course of study, but the fact seems to be that an attempt was made throughout Illinois to put the recommendations for oral composition into practice. Furthermore, many individual teachers report not only that the work was successful, but that it resulted in a saving of time to the teacher. A glance at the "News and Notes" and the editorial pages of *The English Journal* will show beyond a doubt that in certain circles oral composition is rapidly assuming an important place in pedagogical discussions. Whether the movement is to

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<sup>1</sup>*English Journal*, Vol., II, p. 18.

be considered as a fad or as embodying permanent principles, its adherents seem to be increasing rapidly. I was fortunate enough to be present at a March (1915) meeting of the New England Oral English and Public Speaking Conference,—a meeting at which oral composition was the main theme for study. The head of the Department of English of the Manchester High School, New Hampshire, outlined a course used at Manchester. Her enthusiasm for the work was very great, and she had successfully used oral composition as a means of getting students interested in social and civic matters, but she was not able to assert that the speech of the students was improved for the more serious matters of school work and life. At least the teachers in other departments were not willing to say that the students in general used better English as a result of the course.

Some resolutions recently made by the New York State High-School Teachers of English are interesting in this connection:—<sup>1</sup>

“*Resolved*, That this association believes strongly in the need for more attention to oral English in high schools, and that to this end it recommends for graduation from high school and for entrance to college that each pupil be required to pass oral tests somewhat as follows:

“(a) Read acceptably a fairly difficult paragraph of English prose.

“(b) Reproduce acceptably in his own language a similar paragraph read to him by the examiner.

“(c) Speak extemporaneously four or five minutes from an outline on some fairly familiar subject.

“That such examinations be administered only by teachers whose work in oral English had been approved on inspection.”

The New York association also passed this resolution:

“*Resolved*, That after June, 1917, a special license be required of New York State high-school teachers of English.”

I believe California formerly included oral tests in the college entrance requirements. If State associations generally begin to pass such resolutions as has the New York association, the matter of oral composition will become more vital for the college, not only because of the natural reaction from high schools, but be-

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<sup>1</sup>*English Journal*, Feb., 1915, p. 129.



cause it is a part of the business of the college to prepare such teachers as the high schools are resolved to have.

*Arguments Made in Favor of Oral Composition*

The adherents of oral composition make numberless claims in behalf of oral composition. I shall enumerate these claims at some length.

1. Practice in oral composition corrects bad habits of speech by cultivating the ear. Miss Eleanor Sheldon says in effect: "The alertness of a few bright students in taking notes spreads to the many and discomfits the speaker to his profit. Thus the ear of all is made more sensitive. When a gross error is made, the class feels it,—there are knowing glances. The oral theme does more than any other device towards overcoming the bad habits of years."<sup>1</sup> A great many people insist that their students speak without any kind of notes for the very reason that it is desirable to have them make all the errors to which they are prone in their everyday speech. Students and teacher alike take down these habitual errors and use them for class drill. I think there is a great deal of merit in such exercises, especially for teaching English grammar; but it is only the specially gifted teacher who may expect the best results.

2. The oral method possesses many advantages for criticism. In the first place, the teacher's comment is immediate. It is an undeniable fact that the overcrowded teacher is sometimes compelled to hold themes over until the pupil has lost interest in his paper, with the result that he disregards a comment that he would have received with appreciation while his interest was still fresh. Sometimes we are prone to think that freshmen are mature enough to take a man's view and wait patiently for developments, but one has only to look about him to realize that freshmen become not only impatient but even rebellious if their English papers (or their French papers, for that matter) are not returned promptly. Of course, then, for the crowded teacher,—and most teachers are crowded,—any device that will make the criticisms more immediate is to be considered seriously. In the second place, the criticism reaches

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<sup>1</sup>*National Educational Association Proceedings*, 1912.

the whole class, while the comments on the written theme reach only the writer of the theme. The criticism will not reach him unless the teacher is careful to make his comments full and explicit. Furthermore, the students themselves, who are made to act as critics, are made conscious of their own mistakes and their own merits by being forced to watch carefully the speech of their classmates. In this way students form one of the best of habits, namely, the habit of self-criticism.

It is to be noted, however, that this kind of work does not reach the student who needs it most, for that student is frequently inattentive, as well as incapable of getting a great deal of instruction simply through the ear. Besides, one of the greatest difficulties is to get the right kind of criticism from students. "It is hard," says Miss Dorothy Waldo, "for pupils to see that all criticism is not destructive. Pupils, too, are apt to waste their time in minor matters of criticism. Such remarks as, 'She said *and* twenty-five times,' or 'He had his hands in his pockets,' are not uncommon."<sup>1</sup> These remarks were made from the standpoint of the high school teacher, but it is easy to see that it will be a difficult matter to get constructive criticism from college students. Perhaps in the presence of poor criticism the teacher has a better chance to emphasize the things that are worth while,—matters of poor grammar, confused thought, and appreciation of definite planning.

3. In connection with the oral theme the possibility for emphasis on structure is greater than it is in connection with the written theme. According to Miss Sheldon again, "Students come from high school thinking that the outline is a fetish because they have never seen the relation between clear thinking and an outline." She says further that the *so* habit and the *and* habit, causes largely of the stringy sentence, can be corrected under the same system that eliminates the "he don'ts" and the "you was-es." This question of relative emphasis on structure is certainly a debatable one, and one that the individual teacher must decide for himself after having tried both methods. But it must be remembered that the errors

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<sup>1</sup>See The Bulletin of the New England Association of Teachers of English for 1912.

referred to by Miss Sheldon are quite successfully eradicated from the speech of the average pupil by the average teacher who uses the ordinary methods of written composition. Of course there is a remnant of the bad who go on triumphant in error no matter what may be the teacher's method of attack.

4. It is admitted by the advocates of oral composition that larger units are harder to handle, but at the same time it is claimed that the oral work leads to a keener realization of the necessity for careful transitions and summaries. When the class fails to understand the divisions, the student may be required to put his notes on the board, and then to practice passing clearly and easily from one division to the next.

5. The oral theme develops the quality of interest. Students as a rule are sensitive about boring their classmates: they like to make a hit. But they are less merciful to their instructors, who, though professing friendship, are after all, so they think, their greatest enemies. By being compelled to stand before his classmates, the speaker soon learns what we mean by entertaining or convincing an enlightened audience before him. As a result of such practice, varied programs begin to arise,—occasions for toastmaking, debates, and celebrations of many kinds.

6. Work in oral composition demands of the student, so it is claimed, a wider vocabulary, calls his attention to useless repetitions, incorrect uses of words, and so on. But I believe that this claim is not to be taken very seriously. In fact, quite the opposite is true. What student does not in an impromptu speech use the first word that occurs to him without finding time to choose between synonymous terms? Why can he not be made to see these useless repetitions better when they are on paper before him than after they have forever vanished into air?

7. Through oral composition the student develops confidence and a pleasing address. Attention is called to correct position, natural gesture, strength of voice, pleasing modulation, clear enunciation, and standard pronunciation. Miss Bolenius<sup>1</sup> calls attention to four matters in her definition of a fine speaker: position,—body erect and graceful, head up, eyes

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<sup>1</sup>*Teaching of Oral English*, Philadelphia, 1914.

alert and holding the audience, hands loose, natural gestures; voice,—loud, well-modulated, good quality, musical and not nasal, sharp, or gruff; style,—correct grammatically, careful pronunciation, wide vocabulary, clearness, conciseness, coherence, convincing power; ideas,—full, accurate, interesting, fitting to a subject that suits both audience and speaker. Miss Bolenius apparently makes no distinction between speaking and speech-making.

8. Oral composition lessens the work of theme reading. Most writers on the subject assert that the oral theme will do away with a great deal of theme reading for the teacher and needless theme writing for the student. Here they raise a very vital question,—the question of time. Without exception, so far as I know, they would have the oral theme substituted for some of the written work that is ordinarily done. Of course, if this substitution is made, the theme reading will be reduced. In my concluding section I shall have something to say about the advisability of such a reduction.

I have not undertaken to include in this enumeration all the merits ascribed to the oral method of instruction, but I have taken up, I believe, all of the more important considerations. As I have already intimated, most of the things advocated by the adherents of oral methods are matters that absorb the interest of the teacher of written composition. In fact, only the seventh and eighth sections in the enumeration made above go beyond the aims of the regular teacher of composition, and his work has to do with a part of the first of these, namely, enunciation and pronunciation. In other words, the only departure made by the advocates of oral composition is a departure into the field of public speaking. It puts us on a sort of middle ground between English and speech-making. The teacher, therefore, is concerned in the main with the relative value of two systems of accomplishing ostensibly the same ends. At most, oral composition carried to any length is a matter of experimentation for the individual teacher or for the ruling power of the given faculty of English.

*The Necessary Preliminary Requirements*

It is not agreed that oral composition can be done effectively without some special preparatory arrangements. In the first place, though the individual teacher may do something towards oral composition, there must be co-operation among all the teachers of English in the school and among the other teachers as far as possible; for the introduction of oral composition methods is a quite revolutionary measure. This cooperation will be hard to get because of the natural temperaments of teachers: some are by nature very conservative and opposed to change; others are naturally ready to try new schemes. In schools where there are teachers who have been long in the profession, it will be particularly hard to secure unified action for a change. In college this difficulty will be greater than in high school, for the college teacher is as a rule more mature and more individualistic than the high school teacher. Besides, it seems to me that we are going on the assumption that our work in recent years has not been satisfactory to any degree. This the average teacher will probably not admit in spite of the fact that the press seems willing to declare that instruction in English by the colleges is largely a failure.

The next consideration is the equipment of the teacher. To put oral composition into effect in accordance with the methods to be outlined presently, a specially prepared teacher will be needed; that is, a teacher with considerable technical as well as temperamental equipment. Such a teacher should have a good voice and should know the rudiments, at least, of voice culture. He should have rare tact, and unlimited faith in his device.

Finally, there must be among the students a sentiment favorable to oral composition. Of course we may depend on the development of this sentiment as the work develops, but some explanation of the advantages of such a course should be made from the beginning. As shown by Mr. W. Palmer Smith, smooth and ready speech has its advantages in the class-room, in the recitation of a history topic, or in the demonstration of a problem in mathematics. It has its advantages in social relations since the member of society is judged by his general appearance, his ease of manners, and his conversation. Furthermore, it has its

advantages in business. The business man is not favorably impressed with the young man of awkward conversation, slovenly utterance, incorrect pronunciation, and disagreeable voice.<sup>1</sup> These statements, of course, are little more than truisms: no thoughtful person would deny them. But before students will become enthusiastic in their work, they, as well as the teacher, must be convinced that this smooth and ready speech is to be most successfully acquired by the means suggested. Hence the propriety of adopting oral methods to the exclusion of a part of the written is still an open question.

### *Some Methods in Oral Composition*

Below I have outlined a number of methods employed by teachers of oral composition. I am not sure that we can always realize that the writer is talking of oral composition as a distinct form. It is well to keep in mind that in all these cases the student is required to stand before his classmates, and to speak from brief notes or no notes at all.

Mr. J. B. Opdycke<sup>1</sup> insists first of all that the student be given or be made to choose an interesting subject—interesting not only to the speaker but also to a large part of the audience. He insists further on correct breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, daily exercises in fresh air breathing as a means to overcome nervousness and improve the voice; on attention to poise, spontaneity of gestures; on care to pronounce correctly, enunciate distinctly, and to rid the speech of illiterate epithets, such as *this here*, *them there*, *off of*, confusion of *shall* and *will*, *in* and *into*, *lie* and *lay*, and so on. Then he divides his course into two parts as follows:

#### A. Prepared Speaking.

I. Recitation—delivery of passages from memory with the aim of conveying the feeling and expression demanded by the piece in hand.

II. Oratory—limited to oratorical forms designed for practice in conviction and stating beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup>See the opening chapter of *Oral English in the Secondary Schools*, by William Palmer Smith.

<sup>2</sup>*Composition Planning*, New York, 1913.

III. Argumentation—delivery of original material with a view to convict the hearers of truth, and to persuade them to act on their convictions.

IV. Impersonation—dramatic identification of character.

B. Unprepared Speaking.

I. Conversation—simple, or secretarial; that is, dictation of letters, conversations of salesmen, interpreters, and so on. Begin in class with jokes, reports of conversations, announcements, reviews of stories. Have one student prepare a subject, and let the others get at him with rapid-fire questions.

This instruction, continues Mr. Opdycke, should involve matters of inflection (modulation, pitch, force), pause (a means of emphasis and accent and division of ideas), phrasing (grouping language by means of the voice into its grammatical compartments), and subordination (emphasis on the main idea). Vocal training accomplishes in us the power to stand in good position before a class, to explain or describe or argue clearly and forcibly, to converse freely, to identify ourselves with some great character, to develop impromptu power, to meet a "speaking emergency" and think analytically before an audience, to approach an employer, and to talk a letter.

Mr. Opdycke does not undertake to determine how much time should be given to oral composition in the classroom. Presumably he leaves that matter to the teacher, who must be governed largely by the circumstances.

Miss Bolenius gives the following plan for one-minute talks: First she gives instructions to the student after this fashion:

1. Stand in front of the class in an easy but dignified position.

2. Look the audience in the eye.

3. Make natural gestures to emphasize; pronounce words slowly and carefully.

4. Watch the way you make your sentences.

5. Learn to speak ahead—have an outline in mind; stick to your subject; stop when through.

The aim at first is to get the student to speak in a free, easy manner. It requires a resourceful teacher to get the student by his timidity. By the end of the second week the teacher calls

a halt at each mistake and makes the student repeat the sentence. Besides calling attention to verbal mistakes, the teacher keeps on file for each pupil a card such as the following:

Eng. 1.

Thomas Parker.

Nov. 20—Bad position, nervous, "you was," enthusiasm, not clear thinker, tries hard, rambles, "athletic."

Nov. 22—Position better, still embarrassed, double negative, better thought out, subject interesting.

Nov. 24—More at ease, fine subject, done justice to, no grammatical mistake, more ease, voice trailed off at end, tendency to omit "g" at the end of words.

The teacher calls for class criticism, and the students are repaid by their co-operation in wiping out errors of speech. The teacher reserves one corner of the blackboard for faulty expressions such as she hears and such as the students turn in on slips of paper. Miss Bolenius gives a long list of the kind of mistakes which it is her aim to correct. Some of the most common are: "you was," "them there books," "he done it," "ain't it nice," "awfully sweet," "git out," "jist look," "this here," "pernounced," and others of a similar nature. The students group these mistakes under four heads:

I. Grammar,—concord of verb and subject, past tense for past participle, double negative, agreement of pronoun and antecedent, and so on.

II. Pronunciation—sounding silent letters, inserting extra sounds, sounds omitted, wrong accent or vowel quantity.

III. Misused words—confusion of *statue* and *statute*, *empire* and *umpire*, *wait on* and *wait for*, *propose* and *purpose*, *aye* and *ay*, *compliment* and *complement*, *childish* and *childlike*, and so on.

IV. Slang and vulgarisms—*everywheres*, *sort of*, *light com- plected*, *had ought*, *enthuse*, *muckly*, and the like.

Referring to the foregoing sample of filing card, one will observe that Miss Bolenius finds time for oral composition for each pupil on alternating days. At other times, when each speech is three minutes in length, the student makes fewer appearances.

Mr. Ernest Cobb<sup>1</sup> asks why we should set apart a period once

<sup>1</sup>*Education*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 615.



a week for pupils to speak good English. He says we should make every recitation in the English class an oral composition. He admonishes us to have the students speak in real sentences, and to impress upon them the necessity for forceful adjectives and the right order of words. His slogan is, "Seventy-five pupils for a teacher, and no more." In other words, he implies that those who resort to oral composition as a substitute for the written, instead of trying to remove the obstacle of overcrowded classes, are spending valuable time and practically all their time trying to find the royal road. This matter will arise again when the final conclusions are being drawn.

Miss Ward's book on oral composition is an excellent rhetoric, but the principles laid down by her are not at all peculiar to oral expression. In fact, there is but one chapter in the book that justifies the title, namely, Chapter IV, entitled "Actual Speaking." This chapter is very valuable for the teacher who finds the time to give instruction in the elocutionary features of English. It is divided into four main parts: the use of the body, the use of the voice, enunciation, and pronunciation.

Emphasis is placed on the advantages of facing the audience because of the intimacy between speaker and hearer. The opportunity to use the eyes, the need of a natural attitude, the advantages of facial expression for securing emphasis and conveying feeling, the importance of gestures—all these matters are fully treated. Miss Ward goes into much detail about the use of the voice. The matters here referred to are quality, force, pitch, and rate of speed.<sup>1</sup>

The following is Miss Emma J. Breck's plan:<sup>2</sup>

1. Every student speaks at least three times in the half year, more often if time allows. No excuse is accepted.
2. The work is prepared beforehand but not memorized. No notes except brief headings are permitted to be used.
3. The interest of the audience is made the test of the speaker's success. The teacher insists upon the adaptation of subject and treatment to the class, perfect possession of material, and a live manner. Note is made of the subject-matter, bearing, eye, and voice.

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<sup>1</sup>*Oral Composition*, by Cornelia C. Ward, New York, 1914.

<sup>2</sup>*English Journal*, Vol. III, p. 28.

4. Students organize their material—make a well-planned structure according to the principles for written work.

5. The teacher is interested and sympathetic in attitude, but firm and just in criticism.

6. Every English recitation is made to help the special work in oral composition by emphasis on correct posture, clear and distinct articulation, use of complete sentences.

7. Reading aloud is made a part of the exercises.

In Miss Breck's school much interest is taken in dramatics. Students universally, she says, are ambitious to take part in a play. By giving work in dramatics, self-expression is made possible for many who find no opportunity in athletics, debating, or school politics. The work should be under the control of the faculty to insure clean shows and fairness to all. The English Department gives credit for performance in plays. There is great difficulty, however, in finding a teacher suitable for such work.

In discussing the problem of finding a place for oral composition, Miss Breck says: "Make oral composition an inherent and indivisible part of the English work. The training of teachers is inadequate. All must work together. Let the high schools make a plea to the colleges to realize the importance of this kind of work and train teachers for it."

Mr. B. E. Fleagle, whose plan is similar in many respects to the one just mentioned, says in connection with the problem of time: "Correlate the oral composition with the other work in nearly every case. The work requires merely a change of emphasis, making it utilitarian as well as cultural. No special teacher of elocution is needed."<sup>1</sup>

I do not find Miss Bolenius's book helpful. The methods she outlines are too infantile for college use, and, I think, for anybody's use. However, the *English Journal* for September, 1914, says: "To all who are aware that high-school English is being rapidly transformed, the experience of Miss Bolenius will be both stimulative and suggestive. The exact devices which she used may never prove serviceable again, but the principles and motives which they illustrate are fundamental and will one day characterize the English studies of the high school."

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<sup>1</sup>*English Journal*, Vol. I, p. 611.

Mr. W. Palmer Smith divides the subject of oral English into three parts,—conversation, reading aloud, and public speaking. His analysis of the elements of good oral reading and oral English follows:<sup>1</sup>

1. Formal elements: good position, proper control of breath, distinct enunciation, approved pronunciation of words.

2. Intellectual elements: accuracy and facility in oral speech, appreciation and explanation of grammatical rules, vivid mental pictures, vital thought, and ability to use many words correctly.

3. Emotional elements: emotional response to thought, emotional sensitiveness to response of audience, ability to impress hearers, acute ear for vocal effects.

4. Technical elements: vocal expression,—management of voice, time, pitch, force, quality; physical response in facial expression, bearing, gesture.

As already indicated, I am aware that the plans discussed in the foregoing pages are made from the point of view of the high school. But they are the only plans we have had advanced so far, and I presume they will hold about as well in college as elsewhere, provided there is a degree of co-operation among teachers who are convinced of the worth of the work. Furthermore, I have not confined the discussion of the things being done to any one section of the country because in Texas not enough has been done to justify a separate study of the work that has been, and is being, done in oral composition. A need for more oral expression, moreover, is found everywhere, and a solution of the problem is of general interest.

Below I shall give a summary of a course of study which permits of instruction in oral English. The course in its main features was made out by a committee appointed by the Illinois Association of Teachers of English and may be found in their proceedings of January 1, 1913. The course as outlined calls for a great deal of oral composition, but it is flexible enough to allow a reduction of the amount if the teacher sees fit to give less oral English than the course calls for or, in fact, to make the course one entirely of written composition. The

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<sup>1</sup>*Oral English in Secondary Schools*, pp. 8 ff.

course referred to covers a period of eighteen weeks, three recitations a week, and involves a systematic study of description, exposition, narration, and a combination of types. It also provides for extensive class criticism of oral themes, and for drill in punctuation, spelling, grammar, and so on. Furthermore, half of the period on Friday of each week is given to the study of literature in some form, but the character of such work is not clearly indicated. A summary of the course shows:

1. Seventeen oral themes in twenty-five periods, Thursday and half of Friday of each week being devoted to oral composition.

2. Eight written themes, one period each fortnight, on Monday, being given to class correction.

3. Seven periods,—one period on Monday every fortnight,—of drill in punctuation, spelling, grammar, and rhetorical principles.

In the schools for which this plan was designed, an extra period was apparently given to literature. If the course were used in college, where three periods a week are usually devoted to freshman English, it would have to be readjusted to suit the demands of the school for literature. I have already called attention to the fact that the oral work of this course can be reduced to give way to more written composition. The course is interesting, if for no other reason, as showing how the adoption of formal oral composition methods affects the amount of written work that is now being done.

### *Conclusions*

I would have it understood that I have the greatest regard for courses in public speaking. In fact, I look back to my public speaking course as one of the most valuable of my school life. But it has never occurred to me that that work overlapped the usual freshman work in composition, which I took at the same time, or could in any degree have been substituted for it. Notwithstanding my faith in public speaking, after a rather wide investigation of the literature so far produced on oral composition, I am not at all convinced that the new movement, especially in its radical phases, has much to commend it. On the contrary,

I believe that our courses in composition will be weakened when we try to make them virtually courses in public speaking. It seems to me that the advocates of these new methods should, so far as the colleges are concerned, aim to strengthen courses in public speaking and keep them independent of the regular instruction in English. In fact, it would not be a bad idea to require of all boys at least a half-course in public speaking, and to provide elective courses for girls as well as for boys.

But before going into a discussion of my position, it may be well to consider how circumstances sometimes alter cases. In mixed classes there would be more objection to requiring oral composition than in classes composed entirely of boys or girls. Mature young ladies especially should be allowed to decide whether or not they are to stand before their classmates and speak. Again, the number of students presents a problem. If the teacher has, let us say, one hundred and twenty students in his classes—and some teachers have that many—he will be forced to use some device to reduce his theme reading or else require less written work from his students. But in either case, he should make free use of the blackboard rather than employ formal oral methods, so that correct forms will reach the eye at the same time that criticism is being made. Furthermore, the future career of the student makes a special case sometimes. In the normal schools, for instance, it is assumed that the students are preparing themselves for the profession of teaching. Such students find themselves at a loss in their schoolrooms at first if they have not been given a chance in school to become accustomed to facing audiences. My own students often tell me how their embarrassment at the opening of school or on special occasions has been a source of mortification to them in spoiling their plans for well-prepared speeches. My experiments with oral composition, or, rather, oral English, have been on a small scale, such work having been done in argumentation only; but I find students of the normal school glad, in many cases, of a chance to deliver their work orally now and then. However, I have never considered the exercises worth much as a training in correct speech, for the reason that students get absolutely no idea of form from the speeches of their classmates. For this

reason and others that I shall name later, the problem of criticism and the problem of estimating the value of the oral theme are very difficult.

I have already discussed the difficulty of getting the necessary cooperation among the teachers of a school and of getting teachers well fitted, technically and temperamentally, for the task of teaching oral composition. When we add to those difficulties the further difficulties of getting the right kind of criticism and of making the work helpful to the whole class, we find ourselves a long way from conditions suitable to formal instruction in oral composition as a part of the regular work in English. Should we admit, however, that formal instruction in oral composition is desirable, we are confronted with one serious and, I think, insurmountable difficulty, namely, the problem of time. The average teacher has, let us say, ninety students in his classes. In that case he may reasonably be asked to read four pages of manuscript a week from each student, and if he requires that much manuscript, he does not have time for elaborate exercises in oral composition. I am entirely convinced that the average teacher is not willing to reduce the amount of written work now required; for he feels that there is nothing which will take the place of the written theme as a mental discipline. Often the poorest student in English delivers his speech with great enthusiasm and a certain amount of glibness, but his words disappear in the air and leave him scarcely less subject to all the blunders of speech. On the other hand, properly directed effort at written composition has a more permanent value because the mental process is more sustained. Usually when students write, they weigh their words; and the sustained effort reflects upon the spoken word. Students, then, should be given every possible opportunity for writing. They find sufficient opportunity for speaking, and when once care and precision have been secured through practice in writing, fluency in speech becomes a much easier matter.

This leads me to say, then, that the more radical advocates of oral composition are in several respects fundamentally in error. In the first place, they assume not only that our present method is defective, but that it is a failure. That doctrine is a strong indictment against men who have spent a good part of their lives

in trying to improve the use of the mother tongue by existing methods of composition. It will not be accepted by thousands who have respect for what these same teachers have been able to do and are still trying to do.

In the second place, it is my opinion that the whole matter is a shift on the part of English teachers to meet the difficulty presented by overcrowded classes. Hence the advocates of oral methods are misplacing the emphasis by seeking to modify a time-tested principle to compete with a fractious financial difficulty. In Texas, with few exceptions, we are far from the ideal in the matter of the number of students for each instructor, but to my mind the difficulty of teaching English composition must inevitably be solved in a nearer approach to the ideal, and not in a reduction of the amount of written work.

Again, training in English is inherently different from training in public speaking.<sup>1</sup> Training in English composition tends primarily and immediately to develop a knowledge of the language of sufficient intensity and breadth to enable the pupil in his writing and in his speech to use good English,—grammatically correct, unified, coherent, varied, well proportioned. To accomplish these ends, the teacher must, of course, organize the pupil's thinking machinery, but effects other than these are secondary and indirect. On the other hand, training in oral composition, or public speaking, tends primarily to develop the physical and physiological powers of expression as realized in the training of the voice and the developing of poise of body. Effects other than these are secondary and indirect, and are certainly nothing new in teaching composition. A recognition of this fundamental difference between English composition as generally understood and oral English led one of my teachers of English at Harvard to say: "On account of the time and the equipment involved, I am beginning to believe that oral composition should be treated in separate courses. It would be a great advantage to such a course as English A if we could send to expert teachers those

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<sup>1</sup>If anyone is inclined to doubt that oral composition is virtually public speaking, let him examine carefully the section of this essay devoted to the methods of teaching oral composition; and let him note further that teachers of public speaking are taking the lead in the movement.

students whose voices needed training.' There is often a wide difference between good English in reality and a commonly accepted good lecture. Many platform orations, for example, because of their sentiment or the speaker's personality, are effective despite the fact that the speaker violates every standard of good English, and would be considered illiterate in any society, were his production to find its way into print. I have in mind a young man who recently won a place on the debating team in a first-class school. This young man has no working knowledge of English grammar, and in his written work he is not even able to indicate to the eye where one sentence ends and another begins. Yet he was given this place of honor by the students of his own literary society and his own class,—those same students, mark you, who are to be his critics under the plan for oral composition. I cite this instance not as a special case, but, as I believe, in accordance with common experience. Hence I maintain that it is a hard matter to get students to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials when they come to criticise a speech delivered before them. They are apt to overlook even the worst errors in grammar and quibble about matters of little concern. They can see nothing wrong with, "Coming to the top of the hill, the sound grew louder"; but they are very much concerned whether *hearty* in the sentence, "He ate a hearty meal," refers to the character of the meal itself or to the extent of the man's appetite. It appears, then, that if the criticism is to be worth while, the teacher must offer most of it. Thus our sidetrack to the oral method has got nowhere, and the teacher must do as he has been trying to do all the while; that is, size up his class, find its greatest needs, and by the use of the blackboard and the formal lecture strive to have the class see its errors and the way to correct them. Of course, a certain number of students will fail to reach a reasonable standard of excellence after any amount of class work and notice of errors in their written themes. For such as these there remains the conference period, in which criticism is at the best from the standpoint of directness, and in which some will be enabled to establish better habits of effective study, others made to understand their faults of speech, and others encouraged to pursue a more serious course because they realize that the teacher cares for their prog-



ress as individuals. At any rate, let us not mistake glibness and eloquence for conscious correctness.

In one important respect oral composition is not only deficient, but an utter failure. It gives the student no idea of form. It is always well to emphasize matter above manner, but certainly no one will deny that the composition must look well to the eye at a glance, and on closer examination show positive evidence of careful structure. I like for my students to appreciate the fact that by proper spacing, punctuation, and use of margins a composition should be made to look well even too far away for the eye to make out the words. And it has been my experience that those who persist in being slovenly in the form of their papers are inclined to be slovenly in the more important matters of material and organization. Moreover, oral composition fails, not merely in this matter of purely technical form, but in the even greater matter of literary form; that is, in the adequate handling of a large thought in accordance with the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis. Mr. Palmer's words are to the point: "Important as I have shown speech to be, there is much that it cannot do. Seldom can it teach structure. Its space is too small. . . . The brief groupings of words which make up our talk furnish capital practice in precision, boldness, and variety; but they do not contain room enough for exercising our constructive faculties."<sup>1</sup>

However far I am from agreeing with the more ardent advocates of instruction in formal oral English, I realize that the instructor often disregards opportunities for valuable oral expression. In three respects oral English is very important and often very much neglected. The teacher's plan should include time for questions and answers, for oral reports, and for a great deal of reading aloud. It seems to me that the tendency in the American college is to get away from oral expression on the part of the student and to get into a system of lecturing on the part of the teacher. The well-constructed lecture has its place, of course, with the instruction of freshmen, but even that should be developed, as a rule, with informal questions and answers. The teacher should make his assignments as definite as possible, and

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<sup>1</sup>George Herbert Palmer, *Self-cultivation in English*, p. 24.

then plan his questions so as to cover the field. Thus the student is encouraged to work before coming to class, and at the same time he is given needed drill in self-expression. It is not uncommon to hear a student complain that he was called on to recite but once in six weeks, or to hear him declare that he will quit studying if his teacher is not going to find it out. Evidently a vital principle of instruction is involved in the question and answer problem.

Oral reports are particularly valuable in handling supplementary reading. They help the teacher make sure that the reading is being done, and at the same time they give an opportunity for instruction in the important phase of exposition known as criticism.

Finally, reading aloud is not only a good exercise for drill in enunciation and pronunciation, but it is absolutely necessary to the understanding and the interpretation of literature. It is hard to keep the reading aloud of the students from being an interest-killing performance, for the best of them read but poorly. But so much the more should the teacher be patient and persistent in improving the reading ability of the class. The art of reading well is a valuable asset to the teacher. The good reader need never fear wasting his time or boring his hearers. I am not thinking about professional "stage" reading, but of the ability to give, in simple style, simple expression to the thought, to the emotion, and to the harmony of our masterpieces of English literature.

## ENGLISH IN THE GRADES

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English in the grades: a very broad subject, indeed, and just as important as it is comprehensive. It includes those studies that our Texas course of study classifies as the language group, namely, reading, spelling, writing, grammar, composition, and literature. To this work we devote the greater part of our time and attention during the first seven years of a child's school life. And it is quite easy to justify ourselves in giving such an important place to language training; for it is through language, oral and written, that our pupils are to come into possession of their inheritance, as heirs of all the ages. Language is the foundation for other training, a prerequisite for the successful pursuit of any other line of study. One's culture and refinement are judged by the English he uses in writing and speaking, and rightly so; for accurate, polished language is the result of a mental discipline that is necessarily refining. The love and appreciation of good literature, which should follow the right kind of language training, furnish the basis for a thorough enjoyment of the best and highest thoughts of men; and from high thinking comes noble living.

Since, then, English has such a big place in our scheme of education, it behooves us to look carefully after the plans, methods, and results of our work. And in this investigation, let us try to get the right point of view. We hear so much of late about what the college has a right to expect of the high school, and what the high school has a right to expect of the grades, that we almost lose sight of the pupil. The vital question is, "What has a child a right to get from his language training in the grades?" When we measure our work fairly by this standard, we shall be compelled to acknowledge, I fear, that many of our schools, if not all of them, fall short. When viewed from the child's standpoint, this failure becomes a really solemn thing. It makes us think of the admonition, "The mill will never grind with the water that is past." During the first

seven years of school life, if a child is not forming and fixing right habits, he is daily becoming the slave of wrong ones.

Turning, then, to the practical side of this subject, let us consider the *what* and the *how* of the right sort of an English course for the lower grades. For the purposes of this discussion, we shall use the generally accepted terminology of the school, and divide our topic into four general headings: language, composition, grammar, and literature. Of course, this division is arbitrary, and more or less artificial; for each term used is to some extent inclusive of the other three. It will be impossible, too, to keep from overlapping in the discussion; for the best teaching of any one of these subjects is that teaching which correlates most closely the four of them.

What is technically termed language is the most elementary part of English work, and is, therefore, the work that properly belongs in the primary grades. Very often primary teachers fail to do this work because they do not know what should be the content of such a course. This ignorance is probably responsible for the effort to push grammar down into the lower grades. Some schools have attempted to teach the parts of speech and the grammatical parts of a sentence in the third grade. If superintendents and principals would outline the language work more definitely, teachers would see that there is no time for grammar in the lower grades, even if this were the psychological place for it. This is the period in a child's life when oral and written language should be taught in the most systematic and thorough way possible.

Training in oral language should begin the day a child enters school, and should be directed toward the achievement of at least three distinct results,—namely, clear and distinct enunciation, grammatical accuracy, and the building up of a vocabulary.

There is no excuse for sending pupils to high school speaking a dialect instead of English. A foreigner finds it difficult to understand a newly acquired language if it is "English as she is spoke. Such expressions as *wut*, *wen*, *helt*, *gintlemin*, and *ast* should be corrected. Children do not want to continue such practices. They feel a justifiable pride in speaking clearly if their ears are trained to appreciate the niceties of distinct, polished enunciation. Every day pupils should have some suit-

able drill in speech. Set apart some blackboard, or use note books, for such exercises as these: *What* did you want? *When* will you come? He *held* his hat. These *gentlemen* will go. They *asked* me a question. Let pupils read these sentences slowly and distinctly. Change the exercises, but continue to emphasize the same sounds for a considerable period of time. I do not advocate an exactness that sounds stilted and affected; but neatness in speech is just as attractive as it is in dress. The reading lesson affords an excellent opportunity for this work, but should be reinforced with drills for the correction of common errors.

Then there are grammatical errors to be corrected. The schools do not make a systematic effort in this direction. We decide the task is hopeless, and give up without trying; or, we postpone effort, hoping that the later study of grammar will prove the cure-all for bad English. Vain hope! The use of good English is not a matter of knowledge, but of habit. The ear and the tongue must be trained. Every grade teacher should begin each term's work with a definite list of errors to be corrected during that term. For example: In the Texas course of study, based on the state text, the low third grade is to study during a term *saw* and *seen*, *did* and *done*, and double negatives. Let us see how such work may be handled. Take, for example, double negatives. Explain, orally, the meaning of a double negative, and try to give pupils a feeling that it is wrong. Then write the two correct forms of denial: as, "I said nothing" and "I did not say anything." Have pupils copy these forms and read them aloud repeatedly. For the correct use of verb forms, let children write and read over and over again such expressions as these: He saw us; We were seen; They had been seen; I saw you. Do not try to teach conjugation, but language. If our pupils do not learn to use verb forms correctly before they could possibly conjugate verbs, the chances are they never will. Even the nominative and objective forms of pronouns can be taught before a child has studied case. Nobody makes such a mistake as "He went with I." It is in the use of compound expressions that some careful pupils make this painful error. When a child says, "He went with John and I," ask him to repeat the statement, leaving *John* out. He will immediately correct him-

self, without any knowledge of case or construction. Other common grammatical errors can be corrected by similar methods. If teachers would concentrate their efforts each term on the few forms of speech assigned to a particular grade, satisfactory results would follow of necessity.

The next question is how to enlarge and enrich a child's vocabulary. The reading lesson serves this purpose, even when there is no conscious effort toward this end. It will be found helpful to require pupils to read a passage containing new words, and then to paraphrase it. To learn definitions of lists of words does not mean half so much as it does to learn the words in use. Of course, it is a good thing for children to read many books, and they should be encouraged to do this. Every effort should be made to have them acquire the "dictionary habit." Story-telling, too, will be found invaluable. Stories may be told to children, and reproduced by them. Jokes and riddles of the right sort will lead to a keener appreciation of the meaning and power of words. Last, but by no means least, conversation should be made use of in our schools. Teachers and pupils should talk easily and informally about the news of the day, about topics of general school interest, about moral questions and anything and everything that will tend to broaden the horizon, enlarge the vision, and increase the ideas of the pupil. Words come with ideas.

Next we come to the consideration of written language, or composition. So many teachers think this means that at some designated point in the course of study they should begin, without any preliminaries, to require lengthy compositions "made to order." The result is a set of papers so full of mistakes that it is impossible for teacher or pupil to correct all of them. This is a most prolific source of trouble; for every time a mistake is written and not corrected, it takes a firmer hold on the mind of the writer. Correct writing, like correct speaking, should be habitual. The eye, the ear, and the motor activities should be so trained that they choose right forms automatically. For a high school pupil to forget to use an apostrophe proves that his training in the grades was defective.

Composition of the right kind should begin in the first grade. Let our small pupils learn to make clear, concise, simple sen-

tences. Later they should be required to write such sentences. Dictation exercises will be found helpful. They should consist of short, easy sentences, carefully adapted to the grade in which they are used, and made to illustrate rules for capitalization, punctuation, the use of the apostrophe and quotation marks, and the spelling of homonyms. As pupils advance, they should be taught to join some of their short sentences together, so as to make coordinate clauses or to make one clause subordinate to others. After much sentence drill, a paragraph may be attempted. The paragraph idea may be developed in the reading class. Choose some good piece of literature, and let the children name the topic of each paragraph or find the topic sentence. Another good plan may be worked out at the story-hour. Let the teacher tell a story by an outline written upon the board; then have the class reproduce the story by assigning the different paragraph topics to individuals. The work that follows this kind of preparation should be far above the average of high school compositions.

About the sixth grade, regular instruction in grammar should begin. That this work belongs to the upper grades is an indisputable fact, based on the psychology of the child mind. There is no real teaching of grammar except that which calls upon pupils to do logical reasoning, followed by classification and generalization. These mental activities are not characteristic of primary pupils. Childhood is the time for the formation of habits, not for the development of the reasoning faculties. In the sixth school year, however, the easier phases of grammar may be presented, and pupils may be taught to reason about the uses and relations of words in the sentence. Then, if we would incorporate a good, thorough course in grammar in our high-school curricula, and really teach the subject for at least two sessions, our pupils would later rise up and call us blessed. It is impossible to do good work in the study of any language without a knowledge of the grammar of that language. And yet we should not teach this subject as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. Pupils should learn definitions and rules in grammar, not to recite them, but to apply them. A great deal of work in composition and language can be done most effectively in the grammar class, and pupils will learn here to

explain what they have previously been led to observe without knowing the reason. When they learn to distinguish the unrestrictive adjective clause, they should learn how to punctuate it. When they study number, they will understand why they have been earnestly exhorted to exercise care in the use of *this* and *these*. If grammar is taught in the right way, it is easy and delightful. It not only lays the foundation for better English work in higher schools, but it affords a most excellent mental discipline.

But the last word has not yet been spoken. When school days are over and school books are closed, if our pupils go out into the work-a-day world without any love or appreciation of some form of good literature, they are poor indeed. The field of good literature is so broad. Surely there is something in it for every man. There is nothing like it to fill the leisure time of life; there is nothing like it to rest the weary brain. Literature is the one thing in our schools that makes its appeal directly to the imagination, and the imagination is the one faculty of the mind that we most frequently neglect to cultivate.

A taste for good reading is usually a product of cultivation. As soon as a child can talk, his training toward this end should begin. He should learn Mother Goose rhymes, nonsense jingles, and the lullaby that his mother sings as she rocks him to sleep. These things will fill his mind with pleasant fancies, and cultivate his ear for the music of verse, and help him to acquire a feeling of accent and rhythm. When he enters school, he should soon become familiar with the best of fables, fairy tales, folk-lore stories, and legends. He should begin to memorize bits of good poetry, proverbs, psalms, and some selected prose. As he advances through the grades, he should have longer selections to memorize; but these should be carefully chosen, and should always be good in themselves. It makes little difference whether he understands what he learns, or not. Children love to memorize. (This statement is based on long experience and close observation.) The understanding and appreciation of what has been learned will come later, when the memory work would be hard. Then, too, we should read to our children, and talk with them about what they read. If need be, re-



quire them to read the things they should read, but surely there is a better way. A true teacher will endeavor to find it.

In the barest outline, and in as brief a way as possible, we have tried to indicate what the English course in the elementary school should be. We believe there should be more definiteness in this work. There should be a clearer understanding of the end to be attained, and a closer conformity to the psychological principles that should direct us in our teaching. If, in the years to come, our work shall receive from those we have taught the plaudit, "Well done," we shall be satisfied.

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEACHING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH\*

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A considerable proportion of college seniors seem incapable of writing simple, intelligent, correct English. That, at any rate, is Mr. Bok's opinion after having examined some hundreds of letters written by the seniors of our leading colleges. So striking is the manner in which Mr. Bok points out what in my opinion is a real defect of our college teaching that I am glad to preface the first of my observations on the teaching of English by a reference to his article. In the *Outlook* of August 16, 1913, he discusses the character of the English found in about five hundred letters written to him by college seniors in response to a circular letter in which he asked them what their college course had done for them. His main criticism was that the thought was vague, and that the grammar, spelling, and punctuation were all faulty. Not a few articles of protest have been written. One writer objects to Mr. Bok's method of collecting data, another asserts that there are worse crimes than misspelling, while a third professes to believe that Mr. Bok's own English is in need of a rigorous course in composition. But when all is said, the fair-minded must agree that Mr. Bok's main contention is true: a considerable proportion, possibly even a majority, of our college seniors have not acquired the habit of writing good English. I do not believe, however, that the English instructor is entirely to blame. Until the other members of the faculty reach the point where they are willing to refuse papers clearly deficient in English or consistently lower the grades of such papers, not much progress will be made in helping the student to acquire the habit of writing satisfactory English. The boy who drinks coffee from his saucer at breakfast, and eats with his knife at dinner, even though he try

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\*Reprinted, with slight revisions, from *The Pomona College Quarterly Magazine* for January, 1914, Vol. II, pp. 41-48.

to conduct himself at supper with the elegance of a Chesterfield, is not likely to progress rapidly in acquiring good table manners.

A genuine effort is now being made at the University of Texas to secure the co-operation of the faculty in improving the students' English. A committee on students' use of English exists whose duty it is to pass each session on the written work of all students above the rank of freshman. Further work in English is prescribed for such as are deficient, and no student is given his diploma who cannot satisfy the committee that he is capable of writing "clear and correct" English. Furthermore, the faculty are regularly reminded that it is their duty to watch the English used by students in their classes. The catalogue states the instructor's obligation in no ambiguous language: "It is the duty of each member of the teaching staff to require that his students be careful in their use of English, to give due weight in the making up of grades to the students' use of English, and to report promptly to the committee, submitting the evidence, any student whose use of English is seriously defective." As this system was inaugurated only last year, it is not possible yet to state from experience just how valuable it is likely to be. I am informed, however, that some good results are already apparent.

A whole staff of instructors imbued with the feeling that good English is highly important and convinced that the matter is their concern as well as the concern of the English instructors must greatly strengthen the efforts of the latter. And the English faculty in turn ought by the aid of a practical course in composition to lighten the work of the former. Some, like Professor Phelps of Yale or the late Professor Child of Harvard, declare that they disbelieve absolutely in required courses in composition. They doubtless agree with John Milton, who in his essay *On Education* asserts that it is a bootless task "forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations, which are the acts of ripest judgment and the final work of a head filled, by long reading and observing, with elegant maxims and copious invention." Those who look with unsympathetic eyes on courses in composition usually make the mistake of supposing that the aim is to develop the power of producing valuable literary work. Surely it is the teacher's

duty to awaken the imagination if possible and to stimulate those who really possess talent in writing. But in the majority of cases about all the instructor can hope to do is to increase the student's ability to organize his ideas, to write what he means, perhaps with some degree of ease and force, and to write it with reasonable correctness as regards grammar, spelling, and punctuation. If the instructor accomplishes these ends, he will, beyond doubt, have justified his course in composition.

Some college instructors and certainly many high school teachers lay by no means enough emphasis on correctness. They seem to think that an insistence on accuracy of form implies a lack of interest in content, that teachers who require correct spelling and punctuation are like the Scribes and Pharisees, who cared only that the outside of the bowl be clean. One of my students last year, a bright, witty fellow, who always had something worth writing about, frequently handed me compositions that showed a surprising degree of illiteracy. When I asked him how he ever contrived to graduate from high school without the ability to write more correctly, he replied: "My themes were always so interesting that my teacher was willing to forgive my mistakes in English." This attitude on the part of a teacher strikes me as no more logical than it would be to condone unwashed face and uncombed hair if a boy had, say, the virtue of unvarying good humor. Many English instructors who feel keenly the importance of correct spelling, oddly enough, look on the study of punctuation with indifference or possibly with contempt. Yet, certainly, every one must grant that faulty punctuation harms the sense of writing more than faulty spelling; and the futility of expecting a student to punctuate by instinct is clearly enough shown by the letters of Mr. Bok's seniors, in which "punctuation was practically thrown to the wind." Of course, if our high schools trained their students more thoroughly in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, it would not be necessary for the colleges to give these matters much attention. But till that happy situation arrives, an efficient course in composition, while never magnifying the mechanics of writing unduly, must quietly and persistently demand a fair degree of correctness. If students are shown in their freshman year by such a course what their shortcomings in English are,

and if they are kept by the earnest efforts of the faculty in the strait and narrow way for three years more, they should be able in their senior year to write letters that even the critical eye of Mr. Bok would pronounce satisfactory.

Two or three methods by which the teaching of rhetoric might be made more effective have been suggested. I wish to continue by discussing several of my favorite theories about the teaching of literature, more especially poetry. The first of these, which dates from my college days, is that intensive study is the only study of poetry worth while. It seems to me that the opinion that poetry does not require genuine application is quite erroneous. Mental alertness, coupled with some re-reading, is usually necessary for a mere understanding of poetry other than the drama, pure narrative, or such simple lyrics as those of Burns. Which of us who are teachers could explain Arnold's meaning in *Obermann Once More*, *Dover Beach*, or even a little poem like *The Last Word* without some meditation? And when you exchange Arnold's simple, modern style for Spenser's archaic, Donne's "conceited," or Browning's elliptical style, you evidently render the problem of immediate understanding more difficult. Too many students, when they begin college work in literature, are under the impression that, if they have read the assignment, though never so superficially, they have satisfied their obligation. Their eyes dwell, perhaps, on the printed page, but their minds are far away on the football field or at the german. The other day our assignment included Chaucer's lyric, *Truth*. I asked a student what new light this lyric threw on Chaucer's character. He could not tell. I asked him to summarize it. He was unable to do that. Then I hinted at its contents, but still without result. I continued to quiz him mercilessly with the hope of extracting from him at least one idea contained therein. His mind was a blank. At last I said regretfully, "You have not read it." "Indeed I have," he protested, with the air of one who before the judgment bar removes every blemish from his record; "I have read it three times." An intelligent understanding is not the only thing to be gained by thoughtful reading, for a real appreciation and love of poetry ordinarily come by no other means. Poetry is like music: most of us must hear it again and again in order to feel its rhythm

completely and realize its full charm. Last year my students professed to enjoy Chaucer more than any other poet. One reason for this, I am sure, was the thorough study his unfamiliar vocabulary demanded of them. The same thing doubtless accounts in part for the fascination poetry in a foreign tongue exerts on many of us. Even if we are agreed, however, that careful and thorough study on the part of the student is desirable, the difficult task remains of securing that sort of study.

First of all, the instructor should be very careful not to assign longer lessons than the student can master thoroughly in the time allotted. Some teachers, in a frantic effort to "cover ground," assign very long lessons, with the result that the conscientious student wraps the proverbial towel about his head, and studies when he should be sleeping, while the lazy student scarcely studies at all. "I can't get the lesson in the time allotted," he says to himself, "and so I might as well trust to glancing it over hastily and to paying strict attention in class." And often such a program carries him through, although it leaves him with little of the benefit he should have derived from the course. In my opinion, lessons short enough to be read and reread and mastered well should be our ideal. In class the student may easily be shown that no other sort of preparation is acceptable. He will be called on to interpret difficult passages, and to define unusual words, to sum up the thought of a stanza, and to explain the poet's underlying purpose. When a student gives the summary of a poem, it is well to insist that he furnish more than a bare outline, that he animate his summary with some vivid detail, using now and then, if possible, words and brief phrases from the original. I think it is wise to call on only a few students each day, giving them time to make somewhat extended recitations, recitations which will really indicate their grasp of the lesson and in which they can take a genuine pride. Though it is usually irksome to the teacher, the class will certainly be stimulated to better work if their recitations are graded. Memorizing can be used to advantage. Even if the student later loses the power to repeat exactly what has been learned, he retains, nevertheless, a much more definite impression of some of the great passages of our literature than he could acquire by mere reading. Quizzes and

examinations will furnish excellent opportunities to test the student's grasp of the literature, and best of all will stimulate him to the right sort of study during the remainder of the course.

Another means that may be of considerable help in making the student familiar with the literature is a paper of a dozen pages once or twice a term. I say "may be," for unless the student is duly warned, he will very likely hasten at once to the library, secure from several critical works or from the encyclopaedias a mass of notes, many of them taken verbatim, and from these create a horrible medley, quite without independent thought, generally lacking even in unity and coherence. It has always been an enigma to me why teachers are willing to receive the ill-digested and loathsome masses of other folks' ideas that in too many high schools masquerade as original work. To guard against this, I require my students to depend for the material of their papers altogether on the literature studied. The subjects I assign require the rereading of a certain body of the literature for the purpose of collecting material and then the drawing of definite conclusions. Assertions must be backed up by specific references to the poems studied, vague generalities never being tolerated. The following are some of the subjects I assigned last year in my sophomore course in the history of literature, at the conclusion of our study of Middle English poetry: "The World as Seen through Chaucer's and through Langland's Eyes," "Chaucer's Opinion of the Church," "Nature in Middle English Poetry." Some of the conclusions arrived at were false, and some of the papers showed a feeble grasp of the subject. But on the whole there was a very gratifying freshness, sincerity, and vigor in the work of most of the class. In my opinion there is no room for choice between these two types of essays. Not infrequently students have told me that their first real enjoyment and appreciation came with the reading for a definite end. Sometimes the requirement of a first-hand criticism nonplusses a student completely. He is like a child lost in a great city, uncertain which way to go or what to do first. Often a set of simple questions or suggestions prepared by the instructor will set him on the right road. For example, if the student were to write a criticism

of Herrick's poetry, the instructor might make such suggestions as these: "Try to classify the poems according to subject-matter." "Tell what attitude toward life they reveal." "Determine in what respect Herrick's style differs from that of his contemporaries—from Donne's, for example." "If you like Herrick's poetry, try to analyze your feelings, and tell why you like it."

Literature, even though it be studied conscientiously, makes but a slight appeal to certain students. It seems too remote from their daily experiences. As soon, however, as they feel that it bears a definite relation to life, it suddenly acquires a new interest for them. And I believe it should be the teacher's constant purpose to make this relation plain. To some students the superb reality of the Canterbury pilgrims first becomes apparent when they realize that their own companion, the gay young aspirant for glee-club honors, who lives in anticipation of the junior "prom," and whose heart is ever in complete thralldom to some lovely "co-ed," is after all a perfect prototype of Chaucer's blithe young squire, just as yonder grind in frayed trousers, whose last dollar has just been spent for a new edition of Homer, is merely Chaucer's clerk of Oxenford over again. The poetry of Wordsworth, at first, does not arouse the sympathy of most students. But their attitude may change if they realize that what he says about the dignity and beauty of the lives of certain humble people is as true today as it was in the year 1800, and that nature is still clothed in a radiant beauty for the eye that sees. The student is almost sure ever afterwards to feel a greater reverence for the Simon Lees and the Michaels of his own community, just as he is likely to cross the autumn fields or gaze at the dying sunset glow with a new feeling in his heart. In Browning almost all students may be led to find a true counselor and friend. Perhaps no single bit of his philosophy is more stimulating and comforting to those who are forced by the keen competition of the classroom to a constant appreciation of their own limitations than the idea, expressed in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and elsewhere, that success in the highest sense should be estimated, not in terms of things done that can be plumbed by "the world's coarse thumb," but rather by the intensity of the effort put forth. Some poets—Spenser,



for instance—furnish little criticism of life; they wander forever in a dream country, and consequently can not so easily be brought into touch with the student's own experiences. And yet this relating of literature to life must be a constant aim of the teacher if he is really to attain what seems to me the highest success.

What I have said about the cultivation of accuracy in written work and about the intensive study of literature may seem trite to some. Yet the evidences of superficiality in the training of many high school and some college students are so painfully obvious even to those who have not conducted any such extended investigation as Mr. Bok's that they seem to warrant, and even demand, the frequent repetition of practical, concrete suggestions for realizing a higher ideal of accuracy and thoroughness.

## NOTES ON NEW TEXTBOOKS

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It is the purpose of this review to select from the large number of textbooks in English which have appeared since the beginning of 1915 some few that seem to call for special emphasis.<sup>1</sup>

Of the seven books noticed here, one of the most suggestive is certainly Cunliffe and Lomer's *The Writings of Today*. The editors ask, and correctly ask, in the preface: "Why does the teaching of English composition, to which modern schools and colleges give so much time and energy, yield unsatisfactory results?" To this question their answer is: "The main reason is, in our judgment, that it seems to be out of touch with reality; the pupil sees in his appointed task no connection with his life as it is or as it is likely to be. Accordingly, he treats his themes as intellectual 'stunts' that have to be gone through simply because they are part of the course, and he fails to apply in his everyday speech and writing the lessons he has learned in the classroom."

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<sup>1</sup>Cunliffe, J. W., and Lomer, Gerhard R. *Writings of Today: Models of Journalistic Prose*. New York, The Century Company, 1915. xii+390 pp. \$1.50.

Hinchman, Walter S. *A History of English Literature*. New York, The Century Company, 1915. xii+455 pp. \$1.50.

Holt, Lucius Hudson. *The Leading English Poets from Chaucer to Browning*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915. xxv+918 pp. \$2.25.

Tisdell, Frederick M. *A Brief Survey of English and American Literature*. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1916. ix+217 pp. 85 cents.

Woolley, Edwin C. *Written English*. Boston, D. C. Heath and Company, 1915. xiii+321 pp. \$1.00.

Pancoast, Henry S. *English Prose and Verse from Beowulf to Stevenson*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1915. xxii+816 pp. \$1.75.

Snyder, Franklyn Bliss, and Martin, Robert Grant. *A Book of English Literature*. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1916. xix+889 pp. \$2.25.

The editors have, accordingly, tried to give such English as is now written, on subjects that are of vital interest to Americans, and not about subjects that appealed to only a narrow circle of British readers even in the days of Queen Anne, or at best in those of Ruskin. There is certainly a call for a book of this sort. Some teachers have for several years been trying to find a substitute in the current periodicals. But the periodical is a gamble, more or less desperate; for much that it includes, and at times complete numbers, both from the point of view of style and of content, is out of the question for classroom work.

Here is the best that the modern writer can do, from the *Los Angeles Times*, through the *Atlantic Monthly*, all the way to *Punch*. Not the least valuable aspect of the book is that it will help to inculcate in the pupil standards that are worth while in regard to newspapers and magazines, where, alas! most of the unenforced reading of many students has been, is, and will be. All forms of discourse are covered under the ten divisions into which the book is divided.

If the high-school teacher is looking for the orthodox thing unusually well done, with enough of the new to give it a little of the interest of surprise, it can be found in Woolley's *Written English*. As the compilation is about written English, it begins quite naturally (unnaturally, one is tempted to say, considering the way most books of similar aim begin) with several pages of manuscript that afford a real object lesson. Three chapters on letters then follow. The book impresses one as being written from the ground up, the elementary grammatical aspects of rhetoric never being lost sight of for a moment—a feature which the teachers of modern languages, who are incessantly complaining that their students do not know their English grammar, will hail with joy. Punctuation, it may be objected, is handled a little pedantically; but as a whole both writer and publisher have united in the production of a text which, though exceptionally dry in style, may be safely recommended to those who wish a good foundation in the elementary aspects of English composition.

Another high-school text, written by a man who evidently knows the problems of the secondary school, is Tisdell's *Brief Survey of English and American Literature*. The author has

attempted to reduce the study about literature to a minimum, so that more time may be devoted to the study of literature itself. The author and his reader can not always agree in detail, of course; and possibly Dr. Tisdell has his reasons for devoting thirty lines to Poe, while a passage from *Gawayne and the Green Knight* usurps almost two pages of close print. Each chapter is followed by suggestive readings, which are highly practicable, as is also the bibliography of "A Working Library for the Study of English in the High School." The paging of the contents for the end of the part devoted to American literature is wrong, but otherwise the volume, well printed, splendidly illustrated, and well written, seems thoroughly adapted to its purpose. No detailed discussion of it appears necessary, because the field is too well mapped out, and the models are too many for an author to go much astray.

The same thing may be said of the remarkably beautiful volume, *English Literature*, published by The Century Company and intended for use in secondary schools. It is well written, and the carefully chosen and finely executed illustrations are especially noteworthy. The author says that he "has sought to lay stress on the facts of the history of English literature rather than upon the interpretation of it," an aim with which most of us will agree; for the philosophy of literature and an understanding of the underlying movements connected with it are out of the reach of the high-school pupil.

Each of the nine chapters, determined by movements rather than by men, is followed by "Books and suggestions for reading." These suggestions are, however, impracticable, or practicable to only a few highly-favored secondary schools, for they are entirely too inclusive. For example, to the chapter on the seventeenth century, under the heading "History and Criticism," the author gives, among others, Masson's *Life of Milton*, six volumes; Cromwell's *Letters and Speeches*, four volumes; and Wendell's *The Temper of the Seventeenth Century*. If a library were lucky enough to be able to afford these, how many preparatory students would use them? One feature to be especially commended, however, is an appendix on literary forms and another on English verse, because it is an ever-present

difficulty, even in college classes, to get students to distinguish between literary types.

After *The Century Readings in English Literature* showed, a few years ago, how it was to be done, there have appeared several pretentious books that undertake to give in one volume a fairly representative amount of reading in English literature, in both prose and verse and of practically every *genre* save the short-story and the novel. Fashions in anthologies are indeed getting far away from the exclusive form once made popular by the *Golden Treasury*.

For example, *The Leading English Poets from Chaucer to Browning*, gives us twenty-one poets in nine hundred and eighteen double-column pages. The thirteen pages of an introductory sketch of English poetry from Chaucer to Browning might, for most classes at least, have been omitted: it is too elementary to dispense with the necessity of a history of literature. The sixty-one pages of biographical sketches of the poets included help somewhat, however, to obviate such a need. Some editors seem impertinent in their annotations: Dr. Holt has gone to the other extreme, for save occasionally a few lines of introduction to the poems and the dates of their publications, the volume is virtually without notes.

Other features of the volume can best be brought out by some statistics. Chaucer occupies 20 pages; Spencer, 94; Milton, 53; Wordsworth, 55; Scott, 30; Byron, 94; Shelley and Keats together, 73; Matthew Arnold, 36; Tennyson, 134; and Browning, 84.

The editor may hold the idea that long poems are necessary to the understanding of an author's genius, and quite correctly so; but why, nevertheless, are eighty-two pages of the *Idylls of the King* necessary? (The editor says that this much is demanded to show the disintegration of Arthur's character.) Under Byron why are we given so much, in some cases all, of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *Mazeppa*, *Beppo*, *Don Juan*, and *The Prisoner of Chillon*? Surely if any great poet's genius ever repeats itself, that of Byron does here. Scott is given six selections, twenty-eight of the thirty pages being from the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake*. Compare, too, the emphasis on the *Idylls of the King* with the

and Joseph Blanco White, and William Roper, and Sir Francis Hastings Charles Doyle, as given by Mr. Pancoast.

"We are," continues the editor, "sometimes prone to become a trifle narrow and conventional in our literary judgments, to regard not so much what we like as what we are expected to like, and to pay too exclusive a reverence to the canonical books." Is there any such a possibility in the case of the student? The student is seldom so well informed, save in the case of a very few authors indeed, as to know what critical opinion indicates to be most worthy of his homage. Some standards must be inculcated, and it is hard to think of a book that will do more to confuse his standards than this one. There seem to be two reasons why a selection should be included in an anthology: it should be of historical or of aesthetic interest. In many of these selections, it is difficult to see how either of these can exist.

*A Book of English Literature* is likewise an anthology of the inclusive type. In some respects, it is superior to any of its predecessors, but is not so full as the *Century Readings*. *A Book of English Literature* is splendidly gotten up, the type is unusually large and clear, the margins are wide, glossaries are at the bottom of the page, where they should be, the notes and the biographical appendix are fairly full, and the sense of proportion is, as a rule, good. The notes, though not so full as in the *Century Readings*, are better arranged, for they strike the eye at the first glance.

